

# **“Together!” RagnaRock, the Band and Their Musical Life Story**

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It is apparent that nearly thirty years of participation in the band RagnaRock (henceforth RR) has had a vital impact on the lives of its members, who in turn represent a somewhat unusual congregation. Aside from the three leaders—two music therapists and a special education teacher—the other eight members all have a mental handicap of some sort.<sup>1</sup> Some of them also have various physical health problems. Given these aspects, and the fact that the band has existed for so long that four ‘front figures’ already have passed away, this particular musical life story appears to be uniquely interesting and timely: RR’s lifelong story contains not only interesting knowledge of the relationship between lifelong band playing and people with and without mental handicaps; an elaboration of this relationship is also of specific relevance to the field of music and health, especially for those who want to start similar band projects. Because we know of no other bands with such a group of people who share such a long band story, we think it is important to listen carefully to their experiences and descriptions. We therefore felt that we needed to act while the band still existed with this specific group of people.

In order to tell their story, we have collected various data regarding the band’s history. In 2012, we asked the following two questions in an interview with the longest-serving RR band members: What has RR meant for you and your lives? Is there anything in the music and the playing in the band that makes you experience it in a particular way? We mingled the interview data with various RR historical materials, including published articles, TV documentaries and DVDs from tours and concerts around the world.

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<sup>1</sup> Here we will define mental handicap following the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities as an intellectual disability characterised by significant limitations in both intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior that covers many everyday social and practical skills. Such a disability typically appears before the age of eighteen (retrieved 15 October 2011 from [www.aaid.org](http://www.aaid.org)).

We then applied theory perspectives from *performance* and *health*. The data connecting to performance, then, relates to Jampel's (2012) model of band performance. Although we will include reflections here from all of the band members, we will emphasise those from the members with mental handicaps (henceforth simply handicaps). All of the band members have said that they would like their names to be published in this article. The leaders also approved the use of their own names here.

We will begin with a presentation of the background of the band and a review of the particular methodological challenges connected with the interviews. We will then engage with concepts like performance and health and address the potential relationships between the theoretical and empirical aspects of our study.

## Background

*It would have been jolly nice if we could get good enough to come out  
[of the music therapy room] and play for people out there!*  
(Kjell Erik in Næss, 1987)

Following Kjell Erik's solicitation, the band RR came about in 1983 at Nordre Aasen special education school in Oslo, Norway. Its members were mainly former pupils of the *Ragna* Ringdal day care centre, hence the name *RagnaRock*. Interestingly, of course, the name also evokes the Nordic myth of Ragnarok (Bringsværd & Nortvedt, 1995), where we read that the fortuneteller Mime concludes her story of the collapse of the world to the Nordic god Odin as follows: "But everything can end in a thousand different ways". Odin then replies: "So far the collapse is just a bad dream. It is just one of very many possible outcomes. *We still have time to change . . . to find new and better ways*" (ibid., p. 53, our italics, freely translated by authors). Where the myth of Ragnarok ends, then, is where the band *RagnaRock* starts: initially, at least, the founding band members wanted to *change* their identity and social status from *clients* in a day care centre for the handicapped to *rock musicians*. In what follows, we will explore their success in this regard.

Obviously, given their special needs, there were adjustments to be made to the rock band stereotype. The band's first leader, Tom Næss, together with music therapy students Elin Wengersgaard and Grethe Brustad, creatively explored new ways of playing that would allow everyone to master their instruments. The guitars were adjusted to open tunings using fewer (two to four, rather than six) strings, so that the

guitarist could grip the neck with one finger. In addition, the guitar frets were coloured to correspond with a Næss invention known as the 'colour lamp machine', which had foot switches to operate three coloured lamps that directed chord changes—green for C, yellow for F and red for G.<sup>2</sup> Likewise, coloured tape was placed on the keyboards (an accordion and, later, a synthesiser). With these lamps, the band leaders could 'conduct' the harmonies for the band. Since many rock and popular songs are based on three chords, RR achieved a high level of performance ability using Næss's device.<sup>3</sup>

## Concerts, Tours, TV, CDs, and Participants

Success soon followed for the band, thanks to weekly rehearsals for nearly three decades. RR has performed on local and national television several times, has headed up annual concerts and has undertaken many tours. The band's first big trip, in 1987, was to Sandane on the western coast of Norway (Næss, 1987, p. 4). Within a few years, the band had toured Norway and was playing four or five concerts a year. RR attended the Kongsberg jazz festival and played at the 'health dancing' festival at Ringerike Folkehøgskole several times. Once, in connection with Unicef, it also played a Christmas concert in the Oslo concert hall.

Eventually the band travelled outside Norway as well. RR has performed throughout Scandinavia and in several European cities, including Cadiz and Barcelona in Spain. In 2007, the members travelled by minibus and trailer with their instruments to Holland, to perform at the 7<sup>th</sup> Music Therapy Congress in Eindhoven. The band members tell that this trip was a particular highlight of their career performing together.

The band has released several CDs, one of which was produced in Praha in Sono Studio (David Bowie and Julian Lennon, among others, are Sono clients.)

Presently (June 2012), the band consists of eight members with handicaps—Gunn Elisabeth Sandnes, Camilla Asbjørnsen, Rune Larsson, Hans Robert Andås, Kalle Andreas Sydnes, Lars Cato Arnhol, Kenneth Hansen, and Vebjørn Rønningen)—and three co-playing leaders—Heidi Sandmo Kristoffersen, Bjørn Steinmo, and Tom Næss. A former co-leader, Lise Ødegård-Pettersen, was collected for the interviews.<sup>4</sup> The

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<sup>2</sup> The chords themselves were constructed of root and fifth only, because by leaving out the third, either major or minor inclinations were possible.

<sup>3</sup> For more on this rock method, see *Lyd og vekst* (Næss, 1985), *Lettrock* (Næss and Steinmo, 1995) and *Pop and rock with colours: Easy ways of building a pop rock band using special tuning and colours* (Næss and Steinmo, 2009).

<sup>4</sup> The band members have requested that their full names were used in this text. This has been approved by the Norwegian Social Science Data Services (NSD). A disclosure of their identity in an

ages of the band members range from twenty-two to fifty-eight years. In order to avoid stigmatisation, the band members with handicaps will hereafter be called *band members*, while the leaders will be called *leaders*. The band practices for two hours once a week, as it has done since 1983. Though individual participants have come and gone, founder and current leader Tom Næss has stayed in the band since it began.

## Methodological Challenges

Taken together, the historical material and recent interviews represent a large amount of data that we will mine selectively via individual episodes and statements. Our presentation of the RR life story, however, is still intended to be a 'trustworthy narrative' in terms of analysis. In this vein, we will now describe in more detail how we have proceeded and what we have produced.

The entire band (members and leaders) participated in the group interviews. Band members Rune and Hans Robert were also interviewed a second time, individually, in order to follow up on things they brought up in the group interview. One former co-leader was also interviewed separately, in depth.

In the semi-structured interviews, band members varied significantly in their abilities to express themselves—some spoke only a few words, while others were quite active verbally. In order to better understand all of the interviewees, we coupled our textual interpretations with video analysis of the interview context, so we could integrate body language into the data pool. Personal considerations were taken into account as well. One of the band members, for example, does not talk easily and thus often answers questions with a yes or no. This, together with the fact that his epileptic seizures wear him out, made it necessary to structure his interview in stages—first, a short interview alone, then an interview together with the whole band and then a last follow-up over the telephone while he was at home.

Despite the various communication challenges, it was of paramount importance to listen directly to what each person said about being a member of the band. Very often, research on people with handicaps is based on how other people (the experts) observe and interpret them. Following Mohlin (2009) and Tumyr (2011), on the other

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article like this, the band members said, would make them feel proud and happy. In terms of ethics, research and privacy, the publication of full names of people with handicaps is sometimes difficult. The Norwegian Social Science Data Services decided to listen to the band members who said that this was important for them, and that this could be understood as a way to strengthen their identity and self confidence.

hand, we feel that if we want to understand a person's lifeworld, we must talk directly to him or her. Tumyr even insists that by listening carefully to what someone says, we will gain new perspectives on our studies as well as our subjects. In terms of the present project, this means that we have welcomed rather than discouraged unique and even somewhat unusual expressions.

We are aware that these communication challenges demand both an *ethical consciousness* and *careful preparation and consideration of the interview situation* from us as interviewers (Mohlin, 2009). We have therefore tried to prepare for the interview situation adequately and pragmatically so as to encourage the band members to speak easily and freely (Stensæth, 2010). For example, we held many of the interviews right after band rehearsal so that the experiences and feelings of playing in the band were most immediate.

Additionally, we decided that Tom Næss, longtime RR leader, was best suited to conduct the interviews. For the band members, he was someone to whom they have related closely for years. He also shared many of the tours, concerts and other experiences that generated the themes of the RR life story. Næss was therefore someone with whom the members would communicate explicitly and openly, and he knew them as well as they knew him. Interestingly, even Næss had some trouble understanding what the band members meant to say at times in the interviews, but by 'rewinding' his own memories, he has been able to supply who, what, and where to the stories members told. This was very helpful as we sought to develop exact descriptions of feelings and experiences connected to specific events that were mentioned in the interviews.<sup>5</sup>

All in all, we felt that the combination of the textual data sources and the complex but compelling interviews gave us a trustworthy sense of the ways in which the band members reflected upon and felt about their time with RR, while preserving their individual integrity. Following Kvale (2004), we have here sketched out a hermeneutic interpretative approach that engages both the depth and the diversity of these unique informants' responses.

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<sup>5</sup> Scientifically, of course, Næss's double role is problematic, but as part of an author team with Stensæth, he worked hard to contain his bias by continually questioning and discussing what was said in the interviews. In addition, the authors divided their roles here: in general, Næss has collected the data, while Stensæth was the primary author of the study. Both interpreted the data, both individually and in tandem. It is also worth mentioning that both authors are experienced music therapists with long practical experience working with people with handicaps.

## Results

It is apparent that the band plays a major role in the lives of its leaders but especially its members, whom it has profoundly empowered. The change of identity from clients to rock musicians, as mentioned above, represents a huge change in social status and level of self-respect. In what follows, we will venture more deeply into all of this; suffice it to say for now that in the interviews, several essential issues surfaced, and almost all of them were rather positive. This may indicate that the *most meaningful and memorable* impressions of the RR experience are good ones, but it does not mean that the band members have *not* experienced difficulties and challenging times in the band as well.<sup>6</sup>

## Challenges

Bandleader Næss notes that difficulties and negative aspects were always dealt with promptly over the years. A typical challenge was when more than one band member wanted to be the lead singer of a particular song. The leaders then had to compromise by letting each interested band member sing a verse or more. Other times, the band members settled things for themselves through negotiation: "If you let me sing this song, you can have that song".

Conflicts occurred as well. In terms of rehearsal style, if most of the band members wanted a flexible structure but one wanted a strict structure with little room for verbal comments, trouble might ensue. Sometimes certain band members found it boring to rehearse the same song several times in a row. Practically speaking, it could be tricky to find a suitable roommate on tour and agree upon things like bedtime or whether the light stays on overnight.

According to the leaders, thankfully, the band members were generally rather open about how they felt. Not only did this make potential conflicts more transparent and easier to handle but also it seemed to allow them to be quite positive about their band experience. Næss likewise points out that the band members would not have stayed in the band for such a long time if their interest and motivation were low and/or the conflict level was high.

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<sup>6</sup> Among our follow-up questions were the following: Do you find anything difficult about being in the band? Have you ever thought about ending your membership in the band?

## Main Categories

We categorised the main findings using the following subheads: *love for the band, the empowering force of music, fun, mastery of musical skills, unique individual experiences, togetherness and the sharing of a band history.*

### Love for the band

The band members (and leaders), both individually and collectively, tended to feel strongly about RR, based upon the way that they talk about the band. Their comments indicated, above all, a tremendous love for the band as a notion—for the many happy events associated with it, for the music, for the experience of performance, for each other as band members and friends, and so on. When asked what the band has meant to them, for example, they all responded enthusiastically along these lines:

Very much! Everything!

Some of them added a bit more. Hans Robert, for example, said:

RR is where my friends are.

Rune added:

I don't know what I would have done without the band.

Holding the palm of his hand symbolically on the heart side of his chest, he continued:

RR is my life! Sometimes, when I look at Heidi (one of the leaders) while I play the guitar, I can feel it in my heart!

One of the leaders said:

The life with RR has often moved me. It has indeed made my life so meaningful!

Another leader continued:

I feel so at home with this group of people; they're my family.

It seems like the love for the band is very strong: It is expressed as a bodily (heart) and even an existentially (life) feeling that glues them together as family and friends.

### The empowering force of music

The empowering force of music often accompanied other aspects of the RR experience. Rune hinted at this in the following way when he was asked how he feels about playing music:

Better! [He stretches his body and continues in a higher voice.] I feel like another human being! Inside myself and outside myself! [He gesticulates a lot as he says this.]

Later on, he continued:

I like that the music gives hearts to people!

Images of a heart are, for us, a way of indicating how life demanding (i.e. heart) this band member feels about the band. One of the leaders had a similar experience:

It is meaningful for me in my life to witness and be part of what music can do for people. The way it does so in RR is so wonderful!

The empowering force of music arises from a special song, a special group of songs by a particular artist, a particular vocal or instrumental solo or melody, or a song's lyrics. One favourite mentioned by two of the band members is the Norwegian parody of the song 'I Am the Believer' by the popular Norwegian band Vaselina Bilopphøggere (Vaseline Car Demolishers). There seems to be something with this group's funny performance of this particular song that empowers the whole band.

The leaders added that they think the empowering force of music also connects to the immersion of the band members in an energised sort of focus when they perform their music. According to them this has to do with the band members' level of involvement, focused motivation and enjoyment in the musical performances.

### Fun

While the leaders could not explain why the members liked the Norwegian version of 'I Am a Believer' so much, they assumed that it was simply fun (as well as vigorous



and bawdy). In general, in fact, the band members often associated fun with being in RR. Gunn Elisabeth, in a newspaper in 2005, was asked how she felt about playing in a concert at Ringerike Folkehøgskole and replied:

It was great fun!

Kenneth and Rune also mentioned 'fun'. Kenneth stated simply:

It is fun to do music!

In the group interview, they referred to several events as fun, laughing as they described how they had been practicing Elvis's song 'Love Me Tender' by replacing certain words in the song with the colours they were playing:

Love me tender, love me green! Never let me red!

In fact, this happened before RR got the 'colour-lamp-machine', when leaders were still shouting out which colour to play.

Another event the group particularly enjoyed describing was the time when Rune met Carla Bley, the famous jazz pianist, after her concert at the Kongsberg jazz festival. Næss introduced the topic:

I remember that you, Rune, and I went to this concert . . .

Rune interrupted:

Yes, with Carla Bley! [He smiles.] I too remember very well! We went behind the stage. Asked about . . . to get her autograph! Suddenly I couldn't see her face, because she had so much hair . . . So I took her head like this [lifts his hands to his head and pushes hair aside] and I did like this [bends over and kisses in the air].

They continued the conversation, both smiling:

Tom: You kissed her!

Rune: Right on the mouth!

Tom: Right on the mouth, yes. Carla Bley said that that was really something! Very stylish!

Rune: I still [he pauses] have it [he pauses again] in my head.

One of the leaders summarised:

Probably the band wouldn't have existed without the fun! Because that is what it is: it is great fun to play in RR! We laugh and cry because we are so moved, but we laugh the most!

In general 'Fun' seems to be the category that explains why the band players find RR to be so amusing. Their mentions confirm how basic they experience fun to be. As the leader summarizes in the quotation above; the band would perhaps not have existed without the fun. Therefore, like the two former categories, 'Love for the band' and 'The Empowering Force of Music', 'Fun' links to the story of RR as something that vitalizes and empowers the band members profoundly. Perhaps we could say that 'Fun' explains their basic motivation to continue playing in the band?

### Mastery of musical skills

Members all remark upon the satisfaction that comes from the mastery of a singing and playing a song. Rune said:

I like it when I master the guitar playing. I don't like it when it is too difficult for me.

Lars Cato said:

[It is] nice to play the guitar [he pauses]. The best thing about playing guitar is [the] solo and such. [I] practice at home [he pauses]. Not nervous to play for people.

Lars Cato liked to be challenged musically via specific musical tasks such as learning, practicing and performing solos on his guitar. In 'Love Me Tender', for example, he played the melody line as a solo on his guitar, in both the verse and the refrain. He felt very happy and proud when he managed to play his solo without a hitch, confirming Ruud's (2010, p. 41) observation that "music provides opportunities for the building of skills, for joy and pride in vocal expressions and the handling of instruments".

The category, 'Mastery of Musical Skills', does not only underline the importance of having a skill; it also informs professionals working with educational aspects in

band playing about the importance of providing the right challenges and to experience the joy of learning.

### Unique individual experiences

Band members also frequently recall especially memorable meaningful moments. Rune, for example, described the time when a female music therapy student joined the band during a rehearsal to sing 'Summertime' while Rune played the guitar solo. At one point, she caught his eye, and he felt very moved by the whole experience. He remembered:

A tear came then!

In the same interview, Hans Robert recalled a concert on the west coast of Norway when he sang a duet with another local young woman. Because he usually sang solo, the duet (with someone he had just met) felt new and surprisingly warm.

Kenneth linked his RR experiences to audience reception, either personally meeting people and noticing the way that audiences responded during performances—whether they applauded enthusiastically—or even danced along—or not.

Lars Cato, who did not say much, showed his enthusiasm when the members started to talk about the first time he managed to play a guitar solo, something he remembered as very precious as well.

The category 'Unique Individual Experiences' informs us how the band story also is represented by several individual stories. These memorable experiences represent pieces of the band history that also explains how each member personally bonds with the band.

### Togetherness

Everyone in RR experienced a mutual feeling of connection through the band. They all accepted and recognised each other's strong and weak points, and they cultivated a feeling of brother/sisterhood. Perhaps more so than in rock bands without people with handicaps, RR seemed like a 'family project', where the family derives from shared participation in the music, which creates a strong feeling of *togetherness*. It is this feeling that in turn empowers them to write songs like 'Together' (published on YouTube):

You and I, there is something we can do now. You and I, we can make a better world.

Hearing the cry of the people, inviting them into a song of peace, inviting our voices together, and searching a way into harmony.<sup>7</sup>

The word *together* seems to unlock a key aspect of this band's musical life story, in that the change of identity from clients to rock musicians seems to derive directly from the qualitative feeling of togetherness they all share in RR. Together, as rock musicians, they are charming and compelling performers.

### The sharing of a band history

All of the band members liked to recall shared experiences of a specific concert and even a particular song at that concert. Sometimes they also referred to something that had been happening outside the concert hall or during a tour. Their performance at the Music Therapy Congress in Eindhoven, Holland, in 2007 was one such event. The band-leaders attribute its powerful impression upon the members to the strong and heartfelt response from the audience of music therapists there. Norwegian music therapist and theorist Brynjulf Stige described his impressions in an article after the RR performance:

At the recent 7th European Music Therapy Congress in the Netherlands, a large international group of music therapists encountered RagnaRock. Friday night the band was presenting a concert, and I dare say that it was an experience for all who were there. There was something contagious in the warmth, energy, and humor of the musicians—and there was something contagious in the warmth, energy, and humor of the audience!<sup>8</sup>

Stige's enthusiastic description above anticipates the value of RR performances: What do the performances mean to RR's musical life story? This question leads us to the essential notion of performance.

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<sup>7</sup> 'Together' is written by Tom Næss. See [www.youtube.com/watch?v=aB9ZP9guiU8](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aB9ZP9guiU8).

<sup>8</sup> See [www.voices.no/?q=colstige270807](http://www.voices.no/?q=colstige270807).

## Performance

*Christian starts to present the band. He does this with such charm that I wonder if we can live up to this opening. When we hit the first chords, time stops . . . Does everything work? How is the sound with such a big crowd in the room? Will we hear each other well enough to be in tune? The intense tension loosens up when we understand that we are functioning and are in the groove. Already by the first song the response from the audience is just fantastic! We all do our best and the temperature in the band is penetrating the audience, who gives all their warmth and intensity in return. (Næss, 1987)*

None of the abovementioned categories has any salience outside of the structure of musical performance through which they are realised. Both collectively and individually, band members and leaders depend upon a musical *form* that allows them *to act the categories out*. In what follows we will discuss the etymological and existential philosophical aspects of performance as a notion.

Perform comes from the Latin *per-* (through) *formo* (form) and means to carry out an action to completion, or to undertake or proceed, often with skill or care (see, for example, [www.thefreedictionary.com](http://www.thefreedictionary.com)). We find that the verb 'perform' associates with the Latin origin of the verb 'exist', which combines *ex-* (out) with *ist* (being). Both verbs could refer to a way to (personally) *come out* (in the meaning of being heard and seen by others) and have *actual being* (be real, live). To perform becomes in this framework a way to imitate reality, or rather: to perform announces that what is contained within the frame is not simply real, and the more 'real' the imitation the more deceptive it becomes.

Interestingly, the word *person*, which comes from the Latin, *per-* (through) *sona* (sound), also anticipates a link between the words person and sound, which adds another aspect to the philosophical lines of thought: Performing is also identity work. This indicates that to perform in a band is to make music with one's personality or, in Ruud's words, one's "inner feeling of identity" (Ruud, 1997, p. 46). Eventually, identity work in a band like RR becomes an enduring subjective conscious experience of being the same yet different from other people (*ibid.*). In the following we will return to aspects connected to our understanding of the performing.

## Existential Aspects

One utterance with existential aspects came from Rune:

When I perform with RR, I feel that I give the audience musical flowers!

Here, Rune poetically underlines how beautiful he finds the act of making music for others; more broadly, he acknowledges music's ability to create particularly strong and sensuous experiences in general. The value of actually having a form (*per-forming*) with which to reach out to people is very clear here, on an existential level. Elsewhere, he concluded:

'It (RR) is a matter of life and death for me'

As we said initially, RR seems to have a profound meaning for the band members. Perhaps this is because they have few other activities that afford *forms* through which they can explore themselves?

The leaders seem to connect RR to existential and healthful aspects. One of the leaders said:

I get very proud and moved by the band members when they master and succeed in performances. I think that RR means a lot for my life and health!

Næss added:

It is not just that we play by colours; RR has made my life more colourful!

He went on to say that he feels strongly about playing together with the band members with handicaps, whom he thinks of as more colourful than average. He also wondered whether the music allowed for more 'colourful behavior'.

Along those lines, a former co-leader, Lise, emphasised what she labelled the band members' *authenticity*, as she looked back on her time in the band:

It was this authenticity . . . the authentic way of being . . . that the band members showed, which was the greatest thing about RR! And the authentic joy and the appreciation of the music.

Interestingly, although the roles were different between the leaders (who had responsibilities other than the band members themselves) and the members, this asymmetry did not affect their mutual bonding within the band. The co-leader also recalled:

There was no difference between us! When [we were] playing, we all had to achieve on equal levels [draws a horizontal line in the air with her hands] and then we all focused totally [draws a vertical line in the air with her hands] and concentrated. In this, we were a team. Everybody knew what to do! Pure joy! What fun!

As a co-leader who tried to provide the band members with space to express themselves—or what she called a ‘joyful playroom’—she nevertheless was able to share in the transformation that the members underwent in this context. Looking back on her time in RR, she celebrated a unique feeling of being part of something larger and particularly meaningful. She summed up:

I miss RR!

It is obvious that the leaders experienced RR to be a very meaningful part of their lives. It seems as though performing with RR served as a ‘life reminder’, as if playing in the band created a strong feeling of being alive. The leaders also connected the act of musical performance with the feeling of becoming more human. RR was also an arena in which they could practice humanity, so to speak. Playing in the band did not just make their own lives more colourful; it also educated how to become good human beings. RR offered a way for them to move toward a ‘fuller potential’ as human beings (Bruscia, 1998, p. 84; see also Ruud, 2010).

## Identity Work

In his interview, Kenneth surprised us with the following observation:

I especially like to play for people that have mental handicaps like us.

This is the first time we heard him identify himself (and some of his fellow band members) as mentally handicapped. Did the music (and playing in the band) in fact help him construct a realistic self-view? Or did he say this because people with

handicaps tend to applaud more loudly and devotedly than other people do? Music therapist Brynjulf Stige talked to Kenneth after the concert in Eindhoven in 2007 and reported this observation:

After the concert the drum player of the band told me how easy and fun it is to play when people in the audience start dancing. (Stige, 2007)<sup>9</sup>

This could indicate that Kenneth most of all wanted a lively audience whose applause is happy and heartfelt. This not only makes it easier and more fun for Kenneth to play the drums but also creates a way for him to be recognised and build his own identity through the felt and active bridging between him and the audience. Stige reflects on Kenneth's comment this way:

In many ways, this concert enacted a theme that I have taken interest in for some time, namely how performances operate as *co-created events and negotiations of relationships*. (ibid.)

Stige continues by relating RR's performance to Northern myths:

In the context of this congress you could almost think of the power of Thor's hammer Mjølner, if you could excuse this use of the old legend. Well, I am not suggesting that their music could pulverize giants or mountains like Thor's hammer could, but in the concert I felt that it had at least two of the qualities of his famous weapon: It would always hit its target and like a boomerang it would always come back to its owner after use. To be part of this musicking event and experience how the sounds and gestures of the band would 'hit' the audience and then return as energizing feedback of various sorts was fascinating indeed. (ibid.)

With this in mind, we will conclude this subsection by observing that RR's performance reflects the ways in which the band members connect with the audience. The connection facilitated by the performance vitalises both the band and the audience.

We will in the following relate our understanding of the life story of the band to Jampel's (2011) model of performance.

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<sup>9</sup> No paging. See [www.voices.no/?q=colstige270807](http://www.voices.no/?q=colstige270807)



## Jampel's Model of Band Performance

Jampel (2012) relates his model to the performers' view whereby he suggests five dimensions of the band performance for the purpose of analysis:

- (1) connecting within to the music;
- (2) performers connecting with each other;
- (3) connecting to the audience;
- (4) the audience within;
- (5) the totality of experience.

He elaborates upon this scheme as follows:

The experience of performing music involves a complex interplay of connections: between the musician and the music that is being played; between performing musicians in terms of how they feel together playing on stage; between the performer and the audience in terms of the connection that develops between them in both directions, and between the performer and the thoughts within his/her own mind while performing. The experiential totality of these four co-existing states or dimensions represent the presence of a fifth dimension—the feeling state of the performer. If all four previous dimensions are in a relational state of maximum connection toward themselves and each other, a complementary process ensues. The performer and the music are one, players riff off of each other and move more deeply into sync together, the audience gets drawn in by the action on stage, which is felt by the musicians, who then play off of the audience's energy, and the performers' inner thoughts and feelings act to provide emotional connection, which heightens the act of music making by adding depth and meaning. (ibid.)<sup>10</sup>

"When all of this is synergistic", he continues,

the effect can be riveting, transforming the moment into a peak experience (Maslow, 1971), or, as Ansdell (2005) describes it, performance as epiphany, [or] 'natural high'; as 'completion', not competition; as a site for identity work, musical *communitas* and social hope. (ibid.)

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<sup>10</sup> No paging. See <https://normt.uib.no/index.php/voices/article/view/275/440>

*Communitas* refers to the experiencing of being in and sharing an especially meaningful space (Ruud, 1998). This is something both Krüger (2004) and Erdal and Hovden (2008) identify as a typical feeling deriving from the companionship in musical (rock) bands. Erdal and Hovden describe this as a 'we feeling'. It also evokes what Ruud (2010) labels 'space', which designates the area where experiences from different times and environments come together.<sup>11</sup> In this sense, RR is a container for collaborative feelings and experiences, as well as memories and landmarks, a place to which the band members return to recharge themselves. RR, then, affords "an instant way of constructing a cultural and personal platform, which clearly gives a sense of partaking, acting upon" (Ruud, 2010, p. 42). As a collaboration project, RR 'unfolds and grows by containing collective and individual experiences from different times and environments' (ibid.).

The experiential factors emerging from the life story of RR connect to all of Jampel's dimensions. The importance of each dimension, however, seems to vary within the group and according to the individual band member.

*Connecting within to the music* (dimension 1) was represented differently by each of the band members, depending upon certain things. A close relationship to certain music/songs was especially important to Hans Robert. The mastery of musical tasks, such as being able to sing lyrics by heart, was especially important to Gunn Elisabeth and Hans Robert. Learning to play an instrument well enough to contribute to the band was especially important to Lars Cato and Rune. Learning to perform a solo on an instrument was especially important to Lars Cato, Kalle and Gunn Elisabeth.

A metaphor for the second dimension, *performers connecting with each other*, (dimension 2), is a *feeling of togetherness*. This was an important aspect for the band members, and especially Rune, as well as the leaders. Rune recalled more about that moment during Gershwin's 'Summertime' when he met the eyes of the guest singer who was performing with him:

I could feel it in my heart! I get the lady in my chest, in a way! [He holds his hands over his chest and smiles broadly.] And then I give back to her. And then she is moved. And this makes me . . . [He seems moved.] . . . to be used to . . . too much. [He composes himself.]

*Connecting to the audience* (dimension 3) seemed to be important to the whole band but especially Rune and Kenneth, who talked at length about the response and applause from the audience. This dimension, of course, presents certain social

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<sup>11</sup> Ruud refers here to Giddens (see Ruud, 2010).

prospects to the band members. Hans Robert returned several times to a specific event on the first trip to Sandane, when he sang a duet with a local young woman from the audience:

I liked very much to sing with her!

Gunn Elisabeth, in an interview for a paper, was asked if she talked to anyone after the performance:

Yes, I made friends with Kjersti!

In his article, Brynjulf Stige recognised RR's connection with the audience as well, via his metaphor of Thor's hammer.

*The audience within*, (dimension 4) is interesting in that it is both an image and a state of mind. Jampel describes it further:

Performers carry their own audiences around inside of them. In this the audience is unseen to others but present in the mind of the performer . . . These internal presences can serve a deepening, connective function. (ibid.)

Jampel compares this *internal presence* aspect of musical performance to actors' work:

When produced intentionally it can provide an emotional basis for the music much in the same way an actor does in preparing for a role. It may also happen without design, as when in the musical moment an internal association occurs that transports the artist to a particular image, feeling or place. (ibid.)

Thanks to their long musical band story, all of the members carry these internal associations within them in the form of powerful images, feelings, and memories of places. For Hans Robert, then, a certain song reminds him of a particular young woman from the audience (with whom he sang) at a particular time and in a particular place. Conversely, he associates her face (which he sees on videos of the tour, for example) with that particular song. This history of performance evokes 'authentic emotional memory' (in Jampel's words) in Hans Robert and the other RR members. It is a vivid sense of the past that is reactivated in each ensuing performance.

*The totality of the experience* (dimension 5) connects all of the other dimensions, because a disturbance in one of the first dimensions will affect the others and leave individual members (or the band as a whole) discouraged or even unsatisfied. As such, this aspect can help to identify problem areas in the other dimensions that influence the fifth dimension, which has a profound meaning in and of itself. Along with their many concerts, we also include here rehearsals, meetings, tours and every other band-related context.

We believe that it is this fifth dimension, the totality of all of the other band dimensions, that contributes most to the change of identity of the band members from clients to rock musicians, which is, in turn, the most healthful aspect of the whole enterprise, as we will discuss below.

## Health-Promoting Prospects

When the playing in the band becomes vitalising and life fulfilling for the band members, RR begins to have health implications, or prospects for *health musicking* (Bonde, 2011). *Musicking* (see also Small, 1998) reflects the action that is involved, while *health* describes its aim. An example of RR as health musicking would be the way in which the identity work (see before) in the band members affirms emotional and relational experiences for them. One of the band members said that the performing in the band gave her social courage. Normally, she said, when she was among others, her awareness of her ADHD diagnosis made her feel shy, but when she played with the band, she felt empowered instead.

Health, in this context, must be understood in a broad sense as a benefit derived from a long and happy musical life story. It is something other than simply the absence of illness, or surviving. Through health musicking, the band members find themselves able to perform as subjects with integrity and self-respect while being embraced within a family-like environment. Each band member is then empowered to move towards his/her "individual and ecological wholeness" (Bruscia, 1989, p. 84). Poor mental health, on the other hand, would result from a disruption of this ability (Schei, 2009). Each band member is able to be at the centre of his/her own existence, or as Nordenfelt (1991, p. 17, our translation) puts it: "For the human being, health is about reaching his/her vital goals within his/her social and cultural context".

Music therapy pioneer Clive Robbins, in an oral presentation of his work in 1994 to music therapy students in Oslo, put it this way: "Music therapy is in its essence a *celebration* of the unique individual and what he/she can do". There is an ethical aspect here, in that it is the *right* of every individual to feel free to be who he/she is and to grow and

develop uniquely. Kenneth's emphasis upon the importance of audience applause, then, indicates his recognition of his own uniqueness as a person, and of the audience's (and his own) *celebration* of what he can do.

The leaders also touch upon health when they talk about 'the power of what music can do' and the 'authenticity' of the experience and the ways in which the sincere joy expressed by the band members has impressed them profoundly and made their lives more 'meaningful' and 'rich'. All of this relates to their impression of the positive value of playing in the band, for the band members but also for other people and the larger community.

This collaborative ripple effect introduces another aspect of health musicking, expressed here by Stige:

Health is a quality of mutual care in human co-existence and a set of developing personal qualifications for participation. As such, health is the process of building resources for the individual, the community, and the relationship between individual and community. (Stige, 2003, p. 207; Stige & Aarø, 2012, p. 68)

Ideally, then, RR creates a means for its members to participate in society in a new and mutually constructive way. RR becomes more than singing and playing; it becomes a healthy path to social participation, bridging the world inside RR with the world outside. Rune captured this beautifully when he recognised the importance of being able to give (not simply receive) through his performance. After his 'musical flowers', he noted this of the audience:

I see them get happy, that makes me glad!

Rune has something beautiful that he wants to give to other people 'out there', and they are happy to receive it from him! The recognition from others enables his further participation and creates for him at the same time a feeling of inclusion in something larger, as an occasion of both *bonding* and *bridging* (Procter, 2011; Stige & Aarø, 2012). Bonding relates to the social capital Rune gains when he is "associated [through his performances] with groups and networks of homogenous groups of people" (Stige & Aarø, 2012, p. 102), which in turn is manifested in RR as "cohesion, [and] solidarity" with the audiences and through "high levels of emotional support" from them (p. 115). Bridging relates to the social capital that the band members gain as they transcend their differences amongst themselves and with their audience.

## Conclusion

*The audience gives all their warmth and intensity in return.*

*We are one! Common pulse and common temperature.*

*How often in life can we say that we share pulse and temperature with other human beings?*

(Næss, 1987, p. 7)

Lifelong dedication and membership indicate in and of themselves how important RR has been for its members and leaders. In general, their musical life story is about the change of identity from clients to rock musicians, but this band's narrative is also about so much more: certain music, rehearsal methods prepared especially for the band, instrumental learning, significant events and performances, feelings and experiences, even eye contact in rehearsals. The story is very personal and unique for each member, of course, and it contains more unexpressed experiences than the data collected for this study can ever reveal.

However, a musical story as happy as RR's derives as much as anything from sensitive and competent leadership. The leaders have all had several roles. First, they led the band itself, drawing upon musical, educational and therapeutic skills while playing instruments as well. Second, they had to be not only bandmates but friends or even 'mothers/fathers'. When conflicts occurred, for example, they had to negotiate resolutions. When the band went out on tours, they had to make arrangements by booking hotels and buying meals and so forth.

But most of all it was the unique *togetherness* that made the RR story so happy, a togetherness that developed over years through a shared love of music, playing, and each other. RR is therefore an example of how we might create healthful personal and social capital through bonding and bridging for people with handicaps. The band has helped its members avoid isolation, which is today perhaps the biggest threat for people with handicaps, and as such, band participation has been an important component of health for them!

Through our study of RR, we have also found it to represent a means of creative and aesthetic expression that allows for the performance of the self and the development of identity.<sup>12</sup> This reminds us, as well, that playing in a band like RR offers an arena where people with various personal prerequisites can join in but remain who they are. In this sense, RR is an example of how to arrange for activities that accommodate basic needs and at the same time preserve human dignity. Mary Law (2002) quotes Adolph Meyer, one of the founders of occupational therapy, who speaks of the human being as an organism that

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<sup>12</sup> Interestingly, Stensæth et al. (2012) point that because music (and other creative aesthetic activities) are so inviting in the way that they include the senses and cause joy, strong feelings and the experience of breaking boundaries, self-performing is easier to accomplish through such means.

maintains and balances itself in the world of reality by leading an active life. The use that we make of ourselves, says Meyer, "gives the ultimate stamp to our every organ" (Meyer in Law, 2002, p. 640). Therefore, arrangements like RR constitute powerful affirmations of everyone's need to feel wanted, useful and needed.

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